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ABSTRACT

Realia and interdisciplinary approaches help foreign language teachers to provide an active teaching-learning situation for their students and to bring students into direct contact with cultural features of the language that they are studying. This paper reports on an interdisciplinary project conjoining French and art. Under the direction of both the French teacher and the art teacher, students at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (Aurora, Illinois) studied the historical geographical, and cultural features of Provence, and then made their own "santons" of red clay. Italian peddlers first brought the small, brightly colored clay figures to Marseille. Alternatives to working with clay and ideas for sharing the student's experience are presented. Suggestions are offered for adapting the interdisciplinary project to the students of various ages. Teachers of other languages may wish to use the suggestions in their own classrooms. (Author)

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LES SANTONS DE PROVENCE: INSPIRATION FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT

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Abstract

Realia and interdisciplinary approaches help foreign language teachers to provide an active teaching-learning situation for their students and to bring students into direct contact with cultural features of the language which they are studying.

This paper reports an interdisciplinary project conjoining French and art. Under the direction of both the French teacher and the art teacher, students at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, Aurora, Illinois, studied the historical, geographical, and cultural features of Provence, and then made their own *santons* of red clay.

Alternatives to working with clay and ideas for sharing the students' experience are presented. Suggestions are offered for adapting the interdisciplinary project to students of various ages. Teachers of other languages may wish to use the suggestions in their own classrooms.

Over the past four decades, there has been a movement in the foreign language profession to include realia in the foreign language classroom. Researchers, foreign language educators, and curriculum writers have made a strong case for the use of realia in the instructional process (Celce-Murcia 1979; Hirsch 1954; Méras 1954; Brooks 1960). Méras (1954:270) defines realia as visual aids such as objects, pictures, slides, records, tapes or motion pictures that are supplemental to textbooks.

In its summary report (Silber 1959:12), Working Committee II of the 1959 Northeast Conference on "The Language Learner" advises publishers to recognize the new trends in modern language study and to encourage textbook authors who introduce techniques for the use of visual-aids.

Under the impact of the National Defense Education Act, the dialogue-centered materials of the audiolingual approach disseminated rapidly during the sixties. To be successful, teachers were to teach the foreign language, not facts about the language. Kelly (1963: 433) emphasized that the use of English was to be held to a minimum, and direct comparison with the mother tongue strictly avoided. By keeping the new language dominant throughout the class hour, the phenomenon of interference could be minimized. The use of audio-visual aids or realia, with their potential for multi-sensory impressions (Hirsch 1954: 32), became indispensable to teachers in their efforts to get across the meaning of new material without resorting to the use of English. Real objects eliminate the need for translation, writes Rosenbusch (1985: 3). Lucietto and Milanesi (1964: 27), in their *Curriculum Guide for French, Grades 7-12*, recommend that the meaning of new dialogue lines be established through a number of techniques, such as gestures, paraphrase, intonation, and the use of visual props.

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The incorporation of realia into a lesson has been seen as having infinite value in providing an active teaching-learning situation. Rivers (1983: 127) holds that students learn through seeing, hearing, touching, manipulating, making an argument for the use of visual presentations (flash cards, drawings, films); things the students can hold, open, shut or pass to each other. According to Hirsch (1954: 54), visual aids bring forth greater interest in the classroom and working with them makes for more vivid impressions of the material studied. In discussing the value of using graphics or "key visuals," Early (1991: 32), reporting on an English as a second language project, comments that key visuals provide students with the opportunity both to learn language and, simultaneously, learn through language. Berwald (1987: 1) comments that:

> *realia which consist of a minimum amount of language make it possible for even students considered to be slow language learners to be able to understand with a feeling of accomplishment.*

In addition, Walz (1986: 961) posits that by the use of props, illustrations, and realia (bringing materials to class to make the vague into the concrete), teachers may increase the number of student responses in learning activities.

One of the key advantages to using realia is the establishment of a direct link to culture. These objects, proposes Berwald (1987:2), are not only a series of artifacts that describe the customs and traditions of another culture, but they are also a set of teaching aids that facilitate the simulation of experience in the target culture.

The literature abounds with descriptions of effective ways which creative language teachers have discovered to bring realia to their classrooms. Nuessel (1982: 330), for example, uses foreign currencies to teach the vocabulary of colors, metals, shapes, animals, flowers, heraldry, historical personages, culture, civilization, history, and the concept of legend. As meaningful, appealing, and durable teaching instruments in the foreign language classroom, coins and paper notes are difficult to surpass for their richness in classroom potential.

Other foreign language teachers have used postage stamps as nontraditional realia in their classrooms. Stamps may be a richer, more varied resource since they are issued with far greater frequency than currency. Wood (1979:105) presents the postage stamp as a cultural artifact that may be easily photographed and enlarged to facilitate its use and discussion in class. Besides being conveniently handled, the stamp is a symbol of linguistic identity (Wood 1979:106), useful in teaching about the French-speaking areas outside of France.

Still other teachers enrich the foreign language classroom through interdisciplinary approaches which conjoin the foreign language with another discipline, thus revealing the differences between native and target cultures. As early as the sixties, Lucietto and Milanesi (1964:5) suggested to teachers that they correlate foreign language topics with those of other curriculum areas:

> Important cultural values may be found in areas of learning related to that of foreign language. Such areas of learning are history, science, music, art, geography, and literature. Exploration of these related fields will make the student aware of the depth and complexity of the culture and civilization of the country whose language he is studying.

Enterprising teachers search out other departments for faculty who have interests in common with the language department.[1] They jointly develop interesting content for a unit, or even a course, addressing how certain aspects of life are expressed in another culture. According to Rivers (1983:7,77-78), our students want to be able to understand and be understood and to be able to operate in another culture without offensiveness. The very variety of their needs, however, requires us to make broad interdisciplinary contacts and to broaden our horizons to the interpenetration of language in many areas. Rivers (1983:28) proposes reducing the bondage of students to the familiar and the local. She encourages foreign language teachers to cooperate with teachers of the social studies and other subject areas to develop in their students

> *the flexibility, resulting from informed understanding, that will be needed for an open-minded and culturally detached collaboration with other nations in the solution of problems of planetary concern.*

One interdisciplinary effort, reported by Naughton (1978), initially involved the music and French teachers at the Collège Jean Moulin, outside of Paris; and eventually extended to the drawing and the natural science teachers. The students wrote poems about birds and put them to music. Their enthusiasm continued throughout the year, as they visited a museum exhibit on musical instruments, and expanded their interest to researching musical instruments, drawing and describing in writing the instrument of their preference. According to Naughton (1978:261), the student creations resulting from the experiment were delightful because of their spontaneity, humor, and artistic value.

A unit on the *santons* of Provence presented itself as an opportunity rich in cultural and creative potential for students. It offered students the opportunity to work with teachers from another discipline, to use authentic materials, i.e. original *santons* from the towns in Provence, and to learn about an area of France sometimes neglected in textbooks. Creating *santons* would also give the students the opportunity to draw on their own imagination, personality, and background in creating the material on which part of the class would be based.

In preparation for this project, a number of textbooks of different levels were surveyed.[2] The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into what extent the textbooks might contain relevant information concerning Provence and the traditions of this region of France, specifically the *santon* tradition. The texts were analyzed from the perspective of (1) whether or not Provence is presented, (2) what activities are used to promote an understanding of the region, and (3) the extent to which the *santons* might be mentioned.

Ten textbooks for the French L2 classroom were chosen at random. These textbooks represent introductory and intermediate levels for middle school, high school, and college classes. Textbooks are shown in Table I.

Table I

Textbook references to Provence

Text	Significance in terms of depth and amount of material
CC	X
D-M	X
FF	O
LFA	X
LFV	X
NM	X
ONY	X
PF	O
QN	XX
TRI	XX

Key: CC=C'EST ÇA!; D-M=DIS-MOI!; FF=French for Fluency; LFA=Le français actif 1. Approches; LFV=Français vivant 3; NM=Notre monde; ONY=On y va; PF=Perspectives françaises 1; QN=Quoi de neuf?; TRI=Tricolore Stage 3.

The X denotes references to cities or literary or cultural features, while XX denotes a significant treatment of Provence with specific reference to the santons. The O denotes absence of any mention.

The majority of textbooks surveyed provide the teacher with an entrée to a more elaborate treatment of Provence. Working with the help of both the French teacher and the art teacher, students receive an introduction to Provence, its landscape, its historical, cultural, and artistic features, and its products. As preparation for making their own *santons* of red clay, students learn about the origins of the crèche and the *santon* tradition, and how that tradition continues in Provence today (de Sales 1986:16; Guieu 1990:Ross 1991:58-63).

THE ORIGINS OF THE CRÈCHE AND THE *SANTON* TRADITION

Eight hundred years ago, Christmas was not celebrated as it is now. There were no carols, no crèche, and no gifts. It was Francis of Assisi (Guieu 1989; Foley 1959; Cole 1989; Luckhardt 1983), whose mother was from Provence, who staged the first crèche as a memorial to the nativity. Perhaps inspired by his mother's recounting of her Provençal memories of childhood, Brother Francis, in 1223, in Greccio, Italy, created a living tableau (Foley 1959:67) of villagers, a few animals, and a manger. He invited everyone to come and observe the Christmas story. The tender scene in the flickering torchlight so moved the onlookers that the custom spread from Assisi's native Italy, and in time, all over the world.

In Provence, Christmas traditions have always been very strong (Guieu 1989:3) and nativity scenes were among the earliest of them. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the story of the nativity was presented in live performances or pastorales, in puppet shows telling of the travels of the shepherds to the manger, and in figurine displays or crèches. Italian peddlers first brought the small, brightly colored clay figurines to Marseille. Eventually, local artisans beg an to make them in the dress of the period (Ross 1991:60). The Provençal figurines came to be known as *santons* or "little saints."

The Provençal crèches differ in two significant ways from those of other regions (Guieu 1990). First, the birth of Christ is presented in a precise, local setting, along with contemporary Provençal characters. Christ is pictured as born among Provençal people, portrayed carrying on their daily activities. In addition, the *santons* of the Provençal crèche differ by their simplicity. They are generally of small size, and rather than being exquisitely fashioned from rare woods, ivory, and fine textiles, they are made of raw clay, fired and handpainted with watercolors or acrylics. Simple in their origins, the Provençal *santons* were not destined for the homes of aristocrats or for display in churches. Since they were relatively inexpensive and simply crafted, they had a gentle appeal and became popular with both the rich and the poor.

Clay *santons* as we know them today date back only 200 years. Since the *santon* tradition emerged at the time of the French Revolution, the figurines[3] include, in addition to the biblical personages and animals, about 150 characters portraying humble folk, not the monarchy and the bourgeoisie. They include the peasants and tradesmen of the typical Provençal village. The highest placed *santon* is the mayor, with his tricolor sash. He is represented because of his important position in the local community.

Farmyard animals — horses, sheep, lambs, goats, geese, ducks, chicks, pigs, hens, cats, and the shepherds' dogs — are also a significant and lively element of the crèche. Their presence has inspired the imagination of people through the ages (Foley 1959: 105-08) and a number of Provençal folk tales owe their origin to this presence. One tale is about the ox whose cave became the birthplace of the child. Another is about the donkey Ali who carried Mary on his back to Bethlehem. One of the best known legends is that of the golden goat, a mythical creature who wanders in the moonlight and is the protector of ancient monuments and ruins. There is also the belief that cats receive the power of speech on Christmas eve, but alas, they speak only in Provençal.

The *santons* also include (Guieu 1989:3-4) literary characters, such as Tartarin de Tarascon, a character from Alphonse Daudet's 1872 novel, and props with cultural connotations, such as the windmill at Fontvieille, where Daudet wrote his short stories, *Lettres de mon moulin*. There are also some special characters, the making of a particular *santon*-maker or *santonnier*.

Each *santon* tells his or her own story by the modest yet meaningful gift[4] which he or she brings to the newborn child (Dufrenne, Potier, and Carbonel 1986; Foley 1959; Guieu 1990). For example, shepherd Gervais brings a wheel of cheese. The drummer brings music, which he plays on the drum and the flute. A woman offers a cradle so that the child may be more comfortable. The mayor carries no gift in his hands, but instead will offer a speech. The animals keep the baby comfortable with their warm breath. Students certainly have a wide selection from which to choose!

The making of *santons* continues as a cottage industry and entire families are often involved in their production. Many well known *santonniers* are active today in Aubagne, Aix, and Marseille. They use their own imagination as to costumes, coloring, and posture of the *santons*. In 1803 (Foley 1959:88), the first *Santon* Fairs were held in Marseille and Aix. Every December these *Foires aux Santons* are held and many people start or complete their crèches with purchases from these fairs. If one has the opportunity to visit Provence, collections may be viewed in the shops and museums in Marseille and nearby towns.

Suggestions For Classroom Adaptation

While the *santon*-making project involving the art and French teachers was part of the curriculum for students in French IV (high school juniors and seniors) at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, suggestions offered may be adapted for use in kindergarten, and primary and middle schools (Butler 1965; Françoise 1953). They also may be appropriate for adult education programs.

Singing Songs and Writing Short Poems about the *Santons*

Younger children may delight in singing songs about the *santons*. The charming book, *The Saintons Go to Bethlehem* (Hill and Maxwell 1935) presents accompaniments for 20 different songs of the *santons*. They are adaptations of old Provençal folk songs, each one featuring a different *santon*.

Dramatic Presentations

In some kindergartens or primary schools it may be possible to follow the old Provençal custom of presenting a Christmas play of the crèche (a *pastorale* or *crèche vivante*) some time during the week before Christmas. The roles of the *santons* are taken by the children, who may also wish to stage a mini-parade or Christmas March to the Star (Butler 1965) in their costumes before the play begins. Hill and Maxwell (1935) include several full page pictures which suggest simple ideas for the staging of the scenes. Arranged in appropriate order, the whole book of songs may form a Christmas play or *pastorale*.

Another option for dramatization might be a playlet which demonstrates how the making of *santons* could involve the whole family (de Sales 1987:65-68). Children may take the roles of parents or children in telling the steps involved in making the *santons*: clay, color, and love.

Making *Santons* from Red Clay

True *santons* are molded from the red clay of Provence. The red-colored terra cotta clay available to schools here provides students with an opportunity to create an "authentic" *santon*. After studying the individual characteristics of a number of *santons*, each student selects a character and an animal whose "story" and gift appeal in a personal way. Under the direction of the art and French teachers, students fashion their two figurines. They allow the figurines to dry slowly, and after they are fired, paint them with acrylics. Although some colors are significant (red, for example, is a sign of status and wealth), students should be allowed to use their creativity, as do true *santonniers*, in making and painting their *santons*.

An Alternative to Working with Clay

An enjoyable alternative to creating with clay is to enlarge pictures of *santons* using the overhead projector to project larger pictures from a transparency onto poster board or construction paper. The pictures are colored with felt tip pens and may be laminated, or simply used as they are, to create an interesting classroom display.

Oral Presentations and Evaluation of the Completed Projects

Upon completion of the *santons* each student gives a brief oral presentation in French about his/her *santons*, and about the significance of the gifts offered by the *santons*. Students are evaluated on how well they have followed instructions in making their *santons*. Consideration also is given to creativity, accuracy in depicting the personage or animal, and cultural sensitivity.

A *Santon* Social

A party or tea, just prior to the Christmas vacation, provides a joyful send-off and an opportunity for the youngsters to display their *santons* and share the various aspects of their *santon*-making experience with other students and teachers. Administrators and parents could be invited as well. Such a social function provides an effective way for other members of the school community to recognize the accomplishments of the students and the excellence of the French program.

A Field Trip

Santons are fascinating to collect and displays of *santons* may be found not only in museums, but anywhere where someone has developed a love for them. A field trip[5] may be organized in order to view such a display. It is useful for students to see a wide array of the figurines before embarking on their own project. The field trip experience would provide them with a context for their work.

Applications to Other Languages

The approach and procedures described in this paper are appropriate, not only for different stages of learning, but also for the teaching of other languages and cultures. Teachers of other languages may wish to develop an interdisciplinary project which would bring students into direct contact with salient cultural features of the language which they teach.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

Some *Santons* and Their Gifts

Baker	Carries a basket of bread, pompes and fougasses, the favorite cakes of the Provençal Christmas season.
Chimney Sweep	Carries his brushes and his marmotte (woodchuck).
Crèche Scene	The foundation of the crèche setting may be a model of a Provençal farmhouse, or simply a barn. A mill, a well, a fountain, together with miniature trees, moss, rocks, sand and colored paper (*papier-rocher*, if possible)are often used to make the setting colorful and elaborate.
Fishwife	Carries baskets of fish, shiny scales fastened at her waist.
Mayor	A portly gentleman, the mayor sometimes carries a lantern and an umbrella. He wears a blue, white, and red sash.
A Peasant Woman	Carries a one-half liter can. The metricsystem has been used in France since 1801.
Ravi	Village simpleton, with arms raised in wonder, and his female counterpart, *la Ravido*.
Shepherd	Portrayed in both upright and kneeling positions, often with a sheep or lamb. The old shepherd has a white beard and leans on a long staff. The younger shepherd carries a sheep on his shoulders.
Washerwoman	Carries Marseille soap.
Woman with a Brass Footwarmer	Her bright red umbrella is a sign of status and wealth.
Woman from Arles	*L'Arlésienne* wears a traditional, but chic costume. As depicted in the Bizet/Daudet drama, women from Arles have a reputation as heartbreakers.

APPENDIX III

ARLÉSIENNE

FEMME À LA CRUCHE

FEMME À LA POULE

FEMME AU JAMBON

LE CHIEN

LA CHÈVRE

Carbonel

With permission of the artist, MARCEL CARBONEL, Les Ateliers Marcel Carbonel

LE BERGER VIEUX

MAIRE

TAMBOURINAIRE

HOMME AUX POULES

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LE BOULANGER

LE CHAT

LA FEMME AU FAGOT

LE PÊCHEUR

LE MOUTON

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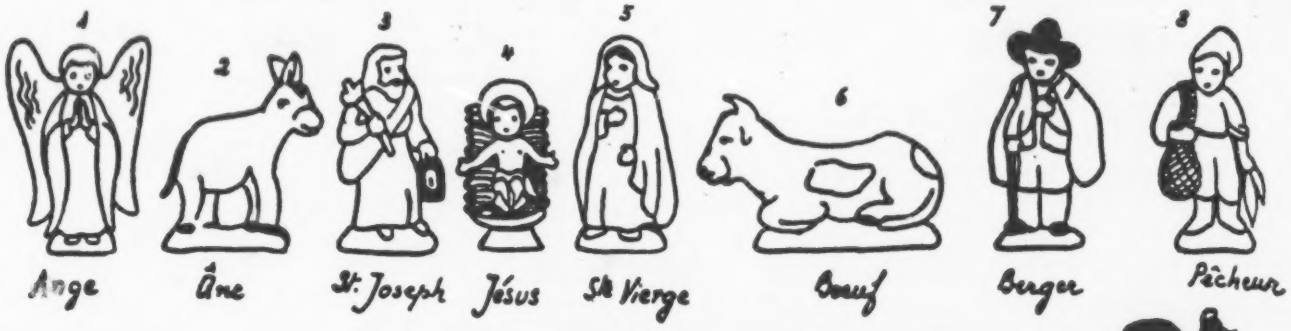
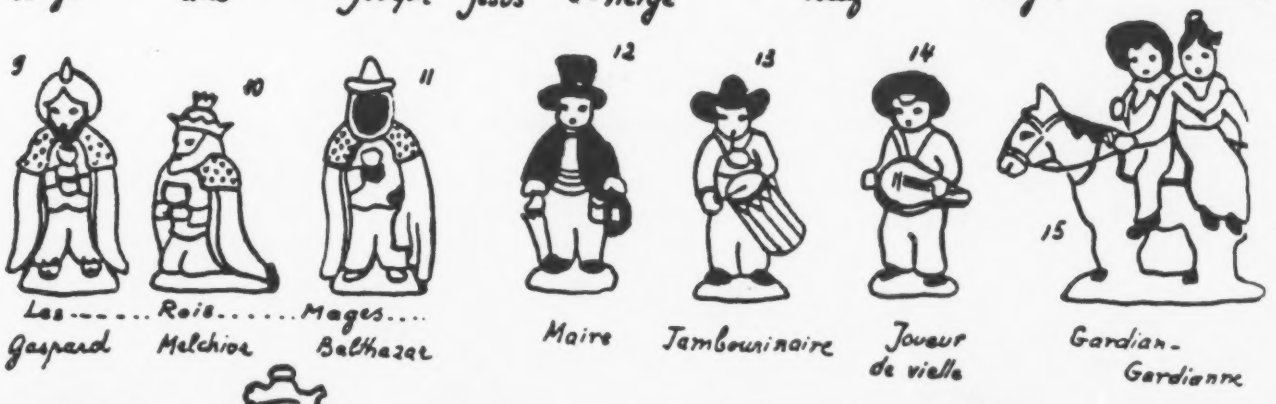
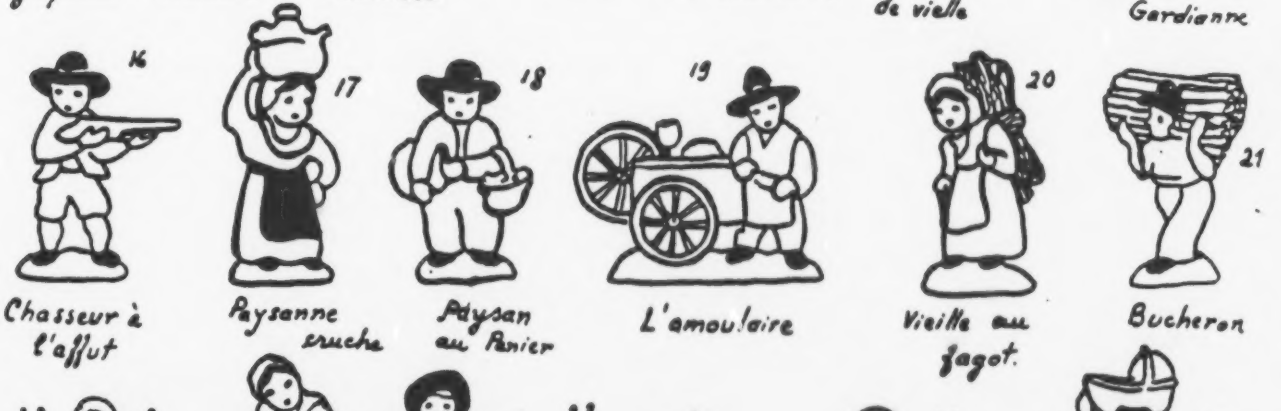
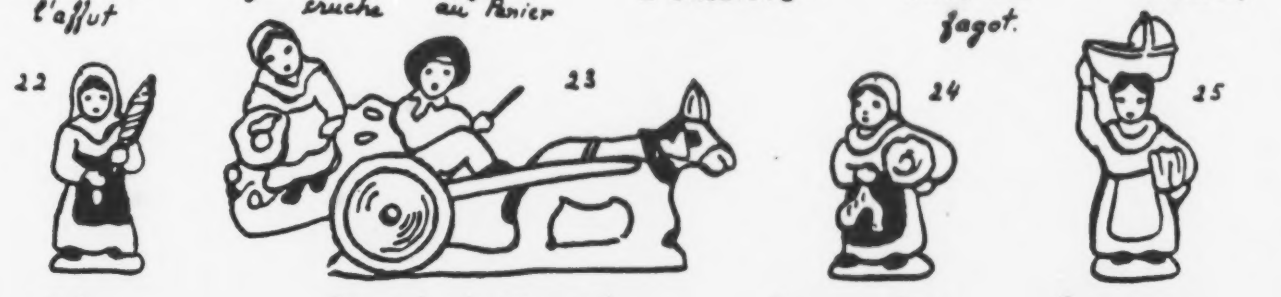
Some "santons"

1 An angel. 2. The donkey 3. Joseph 4. Jesus 5. Mary 6. The Ox 7. The shepherd. 8. The fisherman 9. King Gaspar 10. King Melchior 11. King Balthasar 12. The mayor 13 Tambourine player 14. Hurdy-gurdy man 15. Watchman and his wife.









16. Hunter on the watch 17. Woman with pitcher 18. Peasant with basket 19. The scissors-grinder 20. Old woman 21. The woodcutter 22. The spinner 23. Market wagon 24. Woman with hen 25. Woman with cradle.

Courtesy of Cultural Services of the French Embassy

Reproduction of drawings by Mr. André Filippi

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Endnotes

1. The *santon*-making project and part of the research reported here were carried out while I was on the faculty of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), Aurora, Illinois. Teachers at IMSA are challenged "to forge interdisciplinary connections," not just between mathematics and science, but throughtout the curriculum. Barbara Reardon, leader of the art team, provided the guidelines and worked closely with the students as they made their *santons*.

2. This review of textbooks assumed that course content in schools derives primarily form textbooks.

3. I am grateful to Marcel Carbonel, world renowned *santonnier*, Ateliers Marcel Carbonel, Marseille, France, for his permission to use figures from the book, *Petit dictionnaire des Santons de Provence*. I also thank Suzanne Gonzalez, Department of Art, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, for permission to use her drawings of *santons*. The Cultural services of the French Embassy in New York have long made available to teachers *santon* drawings by André Filippi. Examples of the work of these artists may be seen in Appendix II.

4. Examples of the gifts brought by the santons may be found in Appendix III.

5. Theresa Murphy, of "Le Paradou", a Provençal specialty shop, 316 Campbell Street, Genva, Illinois, graciously invited IMSA students to visit her *santon* display and gave permission to photograph her *santons* for use in the interdisciplinary project described in this paper.

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